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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993

Procedures and norms for the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts

Note by the Secretary-General

1. When reviewing the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 at its thirty-first session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) noted that the justifications for the changes proposed in the staffing table of the Organization were of uneven quality and that "the procedures and norms currently used to evaluate the workload and other needs of the various units in the Secretariat, to justify the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts should be further refined". 1/ The Committee recommended that procedures and norms be developed which were simpler, more transparent and more rational. By section II of resolution 46/185 B of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to review and develop such procedures and norms and "to submit a report with proposals through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, taking into account section I, paragraph 17, of resolution 45/239 A of 21 December 1990".

2. The present note is a preliminary response to the most important and complex questions raised by CPC and the General Assembly. It summarizes the current procedures for changes in the staffing table of the Organization and suggests possible directions for improvement.

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3. Proposals for changes in the staffing table of the Organization are normally formulated in the context of the preparation of the biennial proposed programme budget and are reviewed by CPC, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. Submissions from the various departments and offices of the Secretariat are reviewed first by the Programme Planning and Budget Division and then at a higher level by the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board. However, such proposals also frequently arise from specific decisions taken by the General Assembly and other policy-making organs which entail programme budget implications. They can also be dealt with in the framework of revised estimates reflecting the outcome of ad hoc reviews of the staffing of all or part of the Secretariat, such as the revised estimates submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-third session in implementation of resolutions 41/213 of 19 December 1986 and 42/211 of 21 December 1987; the revised estimates submitted to the Assembly at its forty-fifth session relating to the programmes on Namibia, special political questions, regional cooperation, trusteeship and decolonization; and apartheid; and the revised estimates reflecting the restructuring of the Secretariat, which are before the General Assembly at the current session (A/C.5/47/2).

4. In all cases, the proposals for the creation, suppression, redeployment, conversion and reclassification of posts reflect the outcome of consultations between the departments and offices concerned and the Secretariat officials responsible for reviewing programme budget proposals. In undertaking the present review, a number of factors are taken into account. One factor is the existence of new or revised legislative mandates which may call for the strengthening or phasing out of certain activities. A recent example is General Assembly resolutions 44/243 A and B of 11 September 1990 dissolving the United Nations Council for Namibia and approving the continued implementation of a limited programme of activities following the independence of Namibia. Another approach entails an analysis of the trends affecting the programme of work over the years in relation to the existing staffing levels and bearing in mind the capacity for absorbing additional workload. For example, a comparison of the activities carried out over several bienniums figured prominently in the revised estimates submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session in respect of section 6, Special political questions, regional cooperation, trusteeship and decolonization, of the 1992-1993 proposed programme budget. Yet another criterion used to evaluate the adequacy of staffing resources is a review of the recent performance in programme implementation. In particular, increasing backlogs in the production of mandated outputs such as publications or, conversely, perceived redundancies and overlapping may point to the need for staffing table adjustments. In reviewing proposed staffing table changes, programme performance reports as well as the results of relevant evaluation, Management Advisory Service and audit studies, where available, are also taken into account.

5. Proposals for the creation of new posts and the redeployment or reclassification of existing posts also involve decisions on the appropriate level of the posts concerned. Such decisions are based on recommendations by

the Compensation and Classification Service of the Office of Human Resources Management which is responsible for the classification of posts within the Secretariat.

6. Job classification is a system for determining the relative grading of functions within the Organization. Posts in both the Professional and the General Service and related categories are classified on the basis of standards promulgated by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and approved by the General Assembly.

7. The Commission was established in 1975 as the independent technical body responsible to the General Assembly for the regulation and coordination of the conditions of service of staff of the United Nations common system. It was empowered, under article 13 of its statute, to "establish job classification standards for all categories of staff in fields of work common to several of the organizations" and to "advise the organizations on the development of consistent job classification plans in other fields of work".

8. The Master Standard for the classification of Professional posts was promulgated by the Commission for use by organizations of the common system beginning 1 January 1981. It provides the framework for evaluating job content by taking into account factors such as difficulty of work, independence of work and knowledge required. Separate classification standards have been promulgated by ICSC for posts in the General Service and related categories for use in New York, Geneva, Vienna and other duty stations.

9. The process of job classification consists of two parts: job analysis and job evaluation. Job analysis involves placing the post in its proper context by identifying the mandate of the organization and the role of the immediate office within which the post operates. The level of the job is then determined by comparing requirements of the work to the relevant classification standards.

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10. In practice, the application of these procedures has produced uneven results. A number of factors contribute to this situation. Ideally, changes in the staffing table should be based on the application of agreed workload standards; full and comparable information on workload for each department or office; and the effective application of the classification process. As regards workload standards, however, fully fledged workload analysis has only been applied to Language Services in the Office of Conference Services. Standards have been established for translators, interpreters, typists, precis writers and verbatim reporters. There are significant constraints to extending these techniques to other areas of work, including the considerable preliminary amount of research needed, the complex methodology and the need to establish a system for the collection of data.

11. Attempts at systematic analyses of workload are hampered by a lack of comparable and timely information. Owing to the timing of receipt of budget submissions, it is not always possible to obtain an overview of the overall

programme of work proposed in order to consider possibilities for redeployment of resources. In addition, data from different departments and offices are often not strictly comparable, given the very different requirements for apparently homogenous activities, including the preparation of reports or the servicing of meetings. There is therefore a tendency to favour an incremental approach when faced with additional workloads resulting from new mandates.

12. With regard to the post classification process, the current system, established by ICSC, strives to ensure a fair and objective determination of post levels. However, it involves an extremely complex and time-consuming review of individual job descriptions in the context of the relevant organizational structures. The severe time constraints involved in the preparation of the proposed programme budget and other budget proposals make it difficult to reflect the results of classifications fully in such proposals. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on career development (A/C.5/47/6), efforts are under way to streamline the classification process with a view to making it more responsive to the needs of the Organization.

13. Lastly, it is not always possible to reflect fully the conclusions derived from a review of the programme of work or the results of the classification of posts in the proposed programme budget or other budget proposals because of overall budgetary policy constraints.

14. The Secretariat will continue to study the methodology for workload measurement and the formulation and application of workload standards. This should, however, be regarded as a long-term process. Also, as indicated in the report on career development (A/C.5/47/6), steps are being taken to rationalize the post classification process which should facilitate its making an effective contribution to the process of reviewing changes in the staffing table. The application of the process would also remain under active consideration within the machinery of ICSC. Finally, the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Finance is currently actively engaged in reviewing major questions of overall budget methodology pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/185 B, section VIII, and the related recommendations of CPC at its forty-first session. As part of this process, the Secretariat convened an ad hoc technical seminar in April 1992 and drew upon the results of that meeting in preparing the report of the Secretary-General on the prototype of a new budget format (A/C.5/47/3). To the extent that the process of budget preparation is rationalized and simplified, it should be helpful in improving the integration of the various techniques described above in considering proposals for staffing table changes. In addition, ideas such as the possibility of integrating levels P-2 to P-4 for budgetary purposes or budgeting staff in terms of work-months, could also rationalize and expedite the consideration of staffing table proposals.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 16, para. 43.

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PERSONNEL QUESTIONS: OTHER PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Competitive examinations at the P-3 level

Report of the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

1. The present report on the implementation of competitive examinations at the P-3 level is submitted in response to the request made by the General Assembly in paragraph 15 of resolution 45/239 of 21 December 1990.

I. PROGRESS REPORT

A. Background

2. Under the terms of recommendation 43 of the Group of High-Level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, 1/ subsequently approved by the General Assembly in resolution 41/213, the Group endorsed "... the principle of recruitment of the staff through national competitive examinations for posts at the P-1 to P-3 levels ...".

3. The recommendation to fill entry-level posts at the P-1 and P-2 levels through competitive examinations has been successfully implemented. From 1988 to the present, 194 candidates have been recruited from 32 Member States that were previously underrepresented or below mid-point. Seventy-six of the 194 candidates recruited (39 per cent) were women.

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B. Competitive examinations at the P-3 level held in 1991

4. The first P-3 level examinations were conducted on an experimental basis in four Member States in 1991: Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy and Japan. As competitive examinations for P-1/P-2 levels were held in some of those countries, or in neighbouring countries, the overall cost of the operation was reduced. Two occupational groups were selected, economics and administration, on the basis of projected vacancies in those groups.

5. Entrance requirements were set to be consistent with general recruitment requirements established for the P-3 level. To be eligible, candidates should not be more than 39 years of age and should hold a second-level university degree or an equivalent qualification from a university or an institution of equivalent status in a field relevant to the occupation concerned. Candidates were also required to have at least four years of professional experience in either administration or economics.

6. Ninety-two candidates met the minimum requirements for the examinations and took the written examination in May 1991, 62 in economics and 30 in administration. In addition to papers in specific substantive areas in accordance with existing vacancies or vacancies that were projected to exist in the two occupational groupings, the candidates' skills in analytical capacity and ability to draft were also examined as those skills were essential to the above-mentioned substantive areas. Finally, candidates were tested on their knowledge of international affairs.

7. Following the marking of the examination papers, candidates underwent an oral examination in October 1991, which included a work-oriented task and an interview which assessed, among other factors, their professional experience and aptitudes. All portions of the examination were evaluated by a Board consisting of staff members who worked in the fields being tested and staff members of the Office of Human Resources Management who had extensive experience in testing and interviewing.

8. The recruitment freeze and the change in the promotion system decided upon at the end of 1991 somewhat delayed the appointment process at the P-3 level. However, two successful candidates received an offer of appointment in the occupational group of administration and two other successful candidates received an offer of appointment in the occupational group of economics.

C. Competitive examinations at the P-3 level held in 1992

9. As indicated orally to the Fifth Committee during the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly, a second round of P-3 level examinations was held in five Member States in April 1992: Finland, Germany, Japan, Russian Federation and United States of America. Examinations were administered in four occupational groups: economics, public information, statistics and social affairs including demography. Three hundred and fifty-four applications were received, of which the Board of Examiners convoked 198. Eighty-three

candidates took the examination in the occupational group of economics; 24 candidates in the occupational group of public information; 23 in the occupational group of statistics; 17 in the occupational group of social affairs and 4 in demography.

10. Following the marking of the examination papers, candidates will undergo the oral examination and interviews in the last quarter of 1992.

D. Planning and procedures for competitive examinations at the P-3 level

11. Based on the experience acquired in 1991 and 1992 the following policies and procedures were put into place to administer examinations at the P-3 level:

(a) Competitive examinations for recruitment of P-3 level staff are devised in consultation with the Governments concerned. Confidentiality of the process is a priority consideration. As mandated in General Assembly resolution 35/210, testing methods employed take into account cultural and linguistic diversity of the membership of the United Nations;

(b) Vacancies are defined and offered to each Member State taking into account its geographical representation. In addition to an agreed-upon number of posts that are guaranteed to Member States, a reserve list also is established from which future vacancies may be filled.

12. Based on the experience acquired from the 1991 and 1992 P-3 examinations, posts will be earmarked and reviewed in other occupational groups throughout the Secretariat, in cooperation with the relevant Departments and Offices in order to ensure that the additional specialized examinations are properly focused.

13. Consultations with Governments will be expanded and, after a careful analysis of vacancies, the occupational groupings to be tested determined in accordance with the needs of the Secretariat. The analysis of vacancies takes into account the need to earmark sufficient posts to cover promotion of deserving staff to the P-3 level in order to ensure the career development of staff serving at the P-2 level.

14. The placement and examination process is coordinated with departments and offices, including those away from Headquarters, to ensure that vacancies are filled in a timely manner and with well-qualified candidates who are highly suitable for the posts they will be filling.

II. FUTURE COMPETITIVE EXAMINATIONS AT THE P-3 LEVEL

15. The implementation of the 1992 P-3 examination in four occupational groups for five Member States has been accomplished within existing resources. In view of the current financial situation, it is proposed to continue for the time being administering P-3 competitive examinations on a rotating basis for up to five Member States annually in up to four occupational groups. Where posts cannot be filled through internal promotions or through P-3 national competitive recruitment examinations, it is proposed to recruit at the P-3 level outside of the examinations process through the traditional recruitment methods.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).